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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 002833

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: IMPLEMENTING THE BAKASSI RULING, A  
GON CLARRIFICATION

REF: A) ABUJA 2813; B) BROWNE-FULLER 10/10/02 TELCOM

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER FOR REASONS  
1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (U) On October 10 MFA Permanent Secretary Dan Hart phoned Ambassador to clarify a statement made during their earlier October 7 meeting on Bakassi (Reftel A).

2. (C) At the earlier meeting, Hart stated the GON wanted a "Joint Implementing Committee" with Cameroon in order to manage the post-decision implementation process. Instead of a joint implementation committee focused solely on the Bakassi, Hart said the GON would rather create a "Reconciliation and Good Neighborliness Committee." According to Hart, the committee would be all embracing. While the ICJ ruling and its implementation would be an important part of its work, the Committee as envisioned by the GON, would deal with all aspects of bilateral relations, from consular matters to trade.

3. (C) As part of GON efforts to establish stronger ties with Cameroon, there had been discussions within the Abuja government about urging Cameroon to join ECOWAS.

4. (C) Hart also said that Obasanjo would call Cameroonian President Biya immediately after the judgement was announced. We have no details yet about the call.

5. (C) Comment: The GON is exploring ways to lessen the sting of an adverse ICJ judgement. The obtusely named Reconciliation Committee is one such approach. By engaging the Cameroonians on other issues besides their border dispute, the GON hopes the give and take on these other fronts will spill over into discussions about the ICJ decision. Moreover, the more the GON can focus Yaounde on the benefits of an enhanced bilateral relationship, the less likely Yaounde may push for swift implementation of the Bakassi ruling. The GON wants to make it appear that the practical effect of a "new" relationship with Cameroon trumps the legal ruling and that the situation on the ground will not undergo swift, radical change. If the GON can create this perception, they will be able to better manage public opinion and internal GON hard-liners that might want to fight in order to save the land "stolen" by the ICJ. The big question for Nigeria is whether Cameroon is willing to play.  
JETER